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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 003930

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SUBJECT: ABE ALONE SELECTING NEW LDP EXECUTIVES, CABINET
MINISTERS

Classified By: CDA Joseph R. Donovan for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary and Comment

11. (C) Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will announce his new Cabinet and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership slate on August 27. Leaving the media, outside observers, and his own party in the dark, Abe has involved virtually no one else in the decision-making process. Embassy Tokyo officers have met with a wide range of Diet members, LDP insiders, journalists and academics to get predictions on the new Cabinet line-up. All profess ignorance of Abe's picks and criticize his one-man decision-making style. However, most guess that Foreign Minister Taro Aso will be the LDP's next Secretary General, the party's most powerful position after

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Party President. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki, already unpopular with fellow LDP Diet members, is expected to be ousted because of a money scandal and a public dispute with Defense Minister Yuriko Koike over personnel issues. Koike only joined the Cabinet in July, but she may be a casualty of her confrontation with Shiozaki. In addition, there is growing concern that Abe's executive assistant Yoshiyuki Inoue is not having Abe's choices vetted to ensure their backgrounds are "clean" enough to avoid scandals.

12. (C) Tokyo's current political atmosphere is a mixture of frustration, anticipation, and cynicism -- frustration at being unable to predict Abe's Cabinet, anticipation that he will surprise everyone by producing a strong, capable one, and the cynics' view that most likely he will let them down; the knives already are being sharpened in preparation for disappointment. The media has been full of predictions, but they amount more to an "if I were Prime Minister" view than an insider's assessment of Abe's thinking. With Abe

traveling outside the country until August 25 there is little chance that anyone in Tokyo has an inkling of whom he will choose. In fact, one sitting Cabinet Minister -- Administrative Reform Minister Yoshimi Watanabe -- told Embassy Tokyo that he, like everyone else, has to wait until Monday to learn who is in the new line-up. End summary and comment.

Abe Making Decisions Alone

13. (C) Prime Minister Abe's LDP executive and Cabinet member line-up announcement -- expected on Monday, August 27 -- is a chance for him to redeem himself with the public and his party after the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) crushing defeat in the Upper House election on July 29. However, Abe appears to be ignoring external input in making his decisions, forcing party heavyweights such as former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to vent their frustration in the press.

The media is full of recommendations for posts as well as warnings to Abe to avoid his previous mistake of filling the Cabinet with too many friends and of neglecting factional balance. LDP Diet member Taro Kono, in a conversation with Embassy Tokyo Political Officers, commented that Mori's public pronouncements suggest that Abe is paying no attention to Mori in private. Kono also cautioned that Mori runs the risk of Abe ignoring Mori's public Cabinet suggestions purely to avoid the impression Abe is under the control of the LDP's old guard.

14. (C) Predicting the make-up of Abe's first Cabinet in September 2006 was made easier by Abe's preference for rewarding politicians who worked on his election with positions in the LDP or Cabinet, commented Ken Hakamada,

TOKYO 00003930 002 OF 003

political reporter at TV Tokyo in a conversation with Embassy staff on August 23. This time the situation is much less clear, although certainly some of the names in the press would get posts, he speculated. Cabinet Office Senior Vice Minister and Upper House Diet member Yoshimasa Hayashi in a conversation with Embassy Tokyo staff on August 21 observed that although Koizumi had completely abolished the custom of appointing Cabinet ministers based on faction requests, one could easily recognize which member a faction was seeking to include in the Cabinet, and Hayashi expressed his hope that Abe would take that into consideration. Abe's larger challenge, however, is to unite the LDP, he said. Other Embassy contacts have expressed concern that LDP politicians might turn down Abe's offer of a Cabinet position. Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's policy advisor Isao Iijima, in a meeting with Embassy Tokyo officers on August 22, indicated that at least one position, Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare, has yet to be filled and suggested that Abe's executive assistant Yoshiyuki Inoue would have to do some serious nemawashi (behind-the-scenes maneuvering) to find a willing politician.

Aso In, Shiozaki Out?

15. (C) Only one leadership position appears definite -- Foreign Minister Taro Aso most likely will become the LDP's next Secretary General, according to LDP Diet members and Aso himself. Aso indicated in a recent speech that his time as Foreign Minister is coming to a close, and he has confirmed privately to the Embassy that he expects to become Secretary General. If Aso becomes Secretary General possible successors as Foreign Minister include Shoichi Nakagawa and Yoichi Masuzoe, suggested Hakamada. Masuzoe has been highly critical of Abe for remaining Prime Minister after the election, Hakamada mused, but he would make a highly capable Foreign Minister. Appointing close friend Nakagawa and ideological soul mate, however, would allow Abe to keep some influence over foreign policy, he thought.

¶16. (C) Mori has expressed his displeasure over Aso's potential appointment as LDP Secretary General in the press, arguing that Aso has no experience and will not perform well.

Former Komeito Upper House Secretary General Shozo Kusakawa and senior Soka Gakkai official Yorio Yahiro told Embassy Tokyo that Aso would make a poor Secretary General. Aso, who has never belonged to any other party, lacks the necessary skills to facilitate cooperation between the two ruling parties, they charged. Yahiro said he would prefer Toshihiro Nikai as Secretary General because he left the LDP at one point and joined several other parties before returning to the LDP fold, experiences which have provided him with an understanding of non-LDP viewpoints. An Embassy Tokyo contact confided that influential railway head Yoshiyuki Kasai had warned Abe to keep Aso in the Cabinet where Abe could keep an eye on him instead of appointing him Secretary General because Aso was too ambitious. Kasai also thought that former Cabinet Minister Kaoru Yosano should be considered for a position or at least kept in the loop.

¶17. (C) Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhiro Shiozaki is unlikely to remain in his post. Already unpopular with fellow Diet members and senior bureaucrats for his abrasive style and perceived arrogance, a scandal involving one of his secretaries in his home district may be fatal to his chance

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of staying on in any position of leadership. His money woes were made worse by his hardened stance towards other politicians in similar situations and by press reports suggesting Shiozaki tried to cover up his own problem. His

TOKYO 00003930 003 OF 003

public spat with Defense Minister Yuriko Koike over the replacement of Defense Vice Minister Takemasa Moriya further threatened his position. Shiozaki's relationship with Koike has deteriorated to the point where he refuses to meet with her, according to Iijima, and he did not return her calls about the MOD issue until Iijima intervened.

Koike's Future Unclear

¶18. (C) Doubts that Koike will keep her position in Cabinet also have increased. After the red carpet treatment she received in the United States in early August, her quick trip to Okinawa, and her visit to India and Pakistan, she seemed assured of extending her stay beyond two months, but her handling of Moriya's replacement has renewed concern that she lacks the necessary political judgment for the job. The media has compared her unflatteringly to former Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka, whom Koizumi asked to resign in 2001 after she attempted to fire then-Vice Foreign Minister Yoshiji Ogami. Iijima opined that Koike's pride (ogori) "killed her future," and he suggested former Japan Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga as a possible successor.

Abe Advisor Not Up to the Task

¶19. (C) Embassy Tokyo press contacts have confided that Abe's close assistant Inoue has invited very few -- possibly only two or three -- reporters into his inner circle and manages to stop them from talking to others. Kono said that Inoue certainly had done a poor job of ensuring that Abe's Cabinet choices, such as the late Agriculture Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka and former Agriculture Minister Norihiko Akagi, were properly vetted by the National Police Agency (NPA). (Note: Matsuoka committed suicide over a money scandal in May 2007 and was replaced by Akagi who resigned in late July for a similar offense. End Note.) In contrast LDP Diet member Taro Kono revealed that when he was expecting appointment as Ministry of Justice Parliamentary Secretary in the Koizumi administration, he waited six hours for the official phone call. Finally, he ran out of patience and rang the Kantei

only to be told that the NPA was stilling investigating his background.

Abe Enemies Waiting

¶10. (C) Kono asserted that many of the anti-Abe voices had gone quiet in recent days as the Cabinet announcement drew nearer. He predicted that after the announcement all those who were not on the list would immediately begin attacking the Abe administration again.

Timing of the Announcements

¶11. (SBU) The announcement of the new LDP executives is expected to be made in the morning on August 27, according to Iijima. Abe would start calling in new Ministers in the mid-afternoon and the Emperor's approval ceremony would be held in the evening around 9:00, he said. The vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries will be announced on August 28.

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